

25. RECENT RECORDS OF GARHWAL MAHSEER (*TOR PUTITORA*) WITH A NOTE ON ITS PRESENT STATUS

(With a text-figure)

This contribution deals with the rare records of mahseer, both past and present ones. The latter includes 28 Kg and 23 Kg putitor mahseer recorded by us from the rivers Alaknanda and Nayar, respectively. Though *Tor putitora* is a game fish, in the Garhwal hills it has achieved a commercial status. But on the other hand gradual decline can not be totally ruled out, attributed to its overexploitation. We suggest induced breeding as a measure to protect and propagate mahseer instead of awaiting for convincing proof of its depletion. The Central or the State Governments should come forth with financial assistance for such projects.

INTRODUCTION

For the past one century mahseer have been known to provide good sport. This favourite game fish has shown a gradual decline, attributed to indiscriminate fishing of broodfish and juveniles, pollution, low fecundity, cannibalism etc. (Raj 1945, Pathani 1977, 1978, Das & Pathani 1978, Kulkarni & Ogale 1978, Nautiyal & Lal, in press). The principal species inhabiting the rivers and lakes of the Central and the Western Himalayan sector are *Tor putitora* (Ham.), *Tor tor* (Ham.) and *Tor progenius* McClelland.

The Garhwal region lies in the Central Himalayan sector and the hillstreams of this region harbour only two species, namely *Tor putitora* and *Tor tor* (Badola 1975). In the present contribution we have dealt only with *Tor putitora*.

One of us (P.N.) while on a collection

trip to Banghat (a fish landing centre of river Nayar, Fig. 1) and nearby areas, collected a number of large mahseers of which a female specimen of *Tor putitora* weighed c. 23 Kg. and measured 137.7 cm in length. Mahseer ranging from 5 Kg to 14 Kg were commonly landed either by angling or by gill nets (Nautiyal & Lal, in press) during July-September. In fact they migrate upwards from the Ganga to the foothill stretches to spawn in some of its tributaries during these months. Similarly, we have recorded heavy mahseers from the river Alaknanda during March-April (1981) weighing about 7.800 Kg 10.500 Kg, and 12.50 Kg. Previously, in the year 1978 a large mahseer weighing 28 Kg was also observed by the second author (M.S.L.). It was caught by a local angler. Besides these records we have unconfirmed information from the fishermen inhabiting the Nayar valley that they landed two heavy mahseers weighing about 52 and 38 Kgs during August, 1981. It is obvious that giant mahseers still frequent the hillstreams of the Garhwal Himalayas.

PRESENT STATUS OF GARHWAL MAHSEER

Kulkarni & Ogale (1978) have discussed the status of mahseers and have commented that sport fishing had shrunk considerably in recent years and had resulted in disappointing reports on their numbers and size. They also reported that the status of *T. khudree* was in no way better in Maharashtra rivers like Bhima, Koyna etc. where the fish has become a rarity. The situation is similar in South India also. Karamchandani *et al.* (1967) have reported a remarkable decline in the fishery of *Tor* mahseer from Narbada and

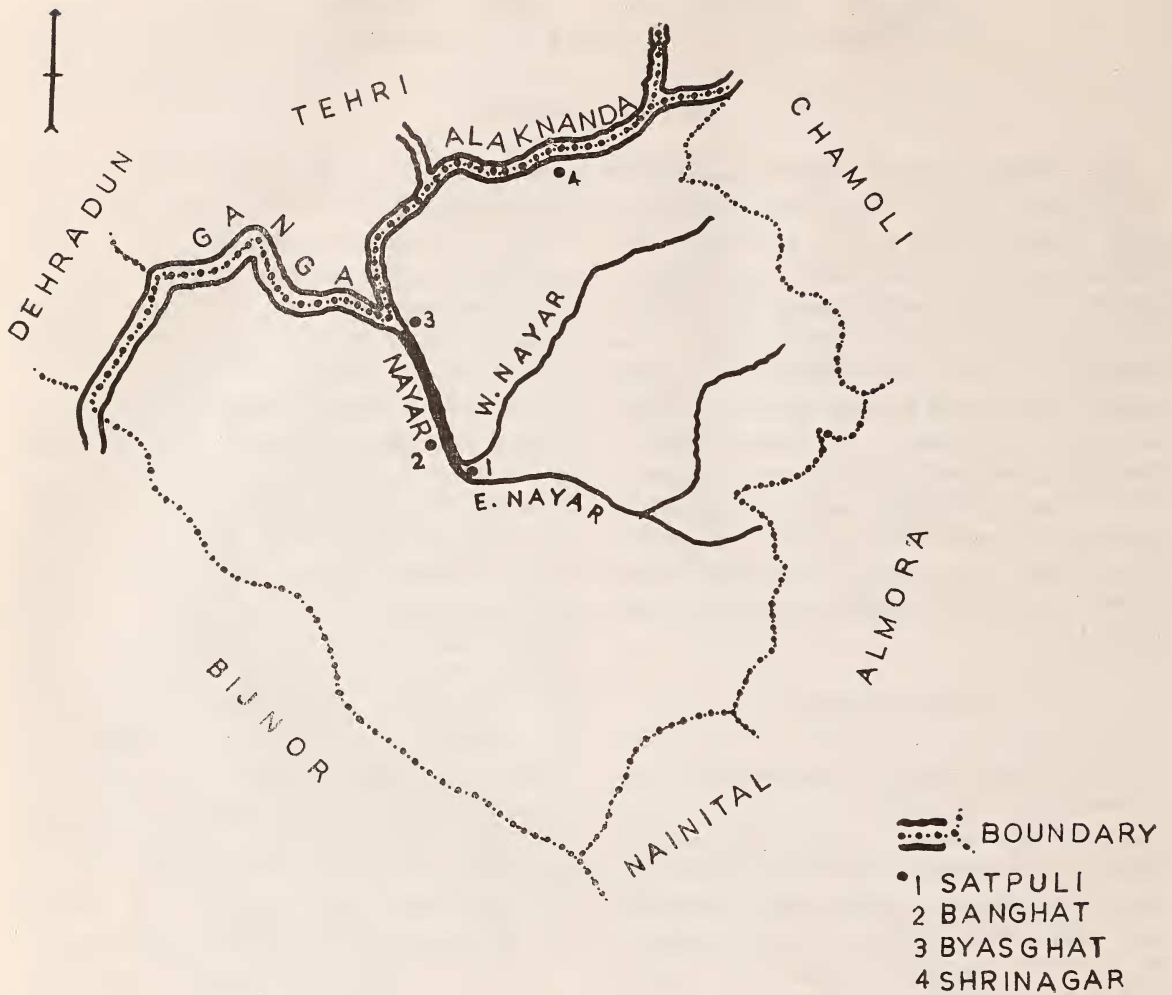


Fig. 1. Map showing the rivers explored and some important fish landing centres surveyed in Pauri Garhwal District.

Tapi rivers in Madhya Pradesh. Sehgal (1972) has assessed that in Jammu, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the ascending and descending mature individuals mainly constituted the putitor mahseer fishery. Sehgal's (1972) and our observations tally, for in the Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh not only the brood fish but also the juveniles were exploited for its

fishery. In fact the latter constitute a major part of the fishery, the brood fish being available for a limited period only. Thus the Garhwal mahseer has achieved a commercial status in this region.

Although it seems from the recent records of the mahseers from Nayar and Alaknanda rivers of Garhwal Hills, that Garhwal mahseer

is biologically in a better position, it is being overexploited in this region also. We have observed local inhabitants using destructive fishing methods and we anticipate a fall in population. Earlier, M. L. Mehta gave a vivid pen picture in Times of India (6.6.1976) of the immoral destruction of mahseer in the rivers near Dehra Dun (U.P.). We should not await further proof of its depletion for instituting conservation measure as then it may be too late to undertake any rehabilitation measures.

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